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Vice Admiral J. King

Second Crisis Management

Interview Summary (U)

August 1976

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VICE ADMIRAL J. KING
Second Crisis Management
Interview Summary (U)

INTRODUCTION

(U)   Admiral King elaborated on several of the topics covered during the first interview; and, in addition, brought up several new aspects of the problems of Crisis Management. His remarks are summarized in the following paragraphs.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE NMCC AND OTHER KEY WASHINGTON CENTERS.

(C)   The initial concept of the NMCC envisioned that representatives from the State Department, the CIA, etc. would be continually present in the NMCC to serve as an interface between the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs, and these other organizations with which these people must interface during times of crisis. With the passage of time, participation by the State Department has continued to decrease, both with respect to the fraction of the time that a State Department representative is physically present in the NMCC and with respect to the grade level of the representative himself. At the present time, no representative from State is present in the NMCC, unless the Executive Secretary of the State Dept. and the J-3 agree that one is needed. That occasion arose only once during King's tenure as J-3; during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

(U)   In Admiral King's opinion, it is important to have a State Department representative in the NMCC, just as it is important that military representatives be stationed in the State Department Operations Centers. The principal reason is that it is often difficult for each organization to understand the other's "lingo". They both use the same words, but sometimes they convey different meaning. The NMCC desk people have constant reference to the State representative to field questions and to find out where to go in the State Department to get answers to specific questions. Similarly, the State Department

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Operations Center people use the military representatives to interpret DoD
messages and to inform State about contingency plans.

(U)   Suppose, for example, that a crisis occurs in, say, the Dominican
Republic. The people in the NMCC get all sorts of requests for information,
some of which can be of a political nature. For example, they might be asked:
"What is the U.S. attitude towards the crisis?"; "What policies have been
agreed upon?", etc. The people in the NMCC have to respond to such questions
and usually in a hurry. The State representative provides valuable support
to the DDO because he can provide the background information, or assistance
in dealing with people in the State Department.

(S)   A specific instance of a situation in which the State Department
people needed military representative assistance occured during the Arab-
Israeli War in 1973 when the U.S. went to DEFCON 3. There was nobody in
State other than the military representative in the Watch Center who knew
what DEFCON 3 really meant. State got terribly upset when, during the
crisis, they heard that certain commercial radio stations were broadcasting
notices for all military persons to return to their bases. What they didn't
realize was that this is an integral part of going to DEFCON 3.

(C)   It is interesting to note that even though State has withdrawn their
representative from the NMCC, except during specific crisis situations, they
have strongly resisted any move on DoD's part to pull military representatives
out of the State Operations Center.

(C)   The formal relationship between DoD and State is through ISA. With
certain exceptions, the desk people in the NMCC are prohibited from direct
contacts with State on day-to-day routine business by Secretary of Defense
policy. The NMCC, the J-3, the J-5, and the Chairman receive a stream of
State Department cables on topics of current interest, but usually a day late.
The NMCC receives them in batches. It is highly unlikely that the State De-
partment would agree to have the NMCC "on-line" for such State Department cable
traffic, because State would want to, and should, filter it first.

(U)   State has put into effect what King considers, at least in concept, an
admirable system of having message originators put "tags" or "key words"

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designators at the head of each message. It is effectively a tool both for distribution and retrieval of all their messages. King feels that the same type of procedure would be used to automatically route and file messages within the Defense Department. To his knowledge, such a system is not yet implemented in DoD. He remarked that there is a "four-digit file number" used to categorize the subject of messages, but the system hasn't been enforced. It is cumbersome and almost all messages end up in the 5000.1 file, which is "general".

(U)   In summary, one of the difficulties in the representation relationship between State and the NMCC is that both the military people in State and the State representative in the NMCC act as "information go-getters" and it is hard to maintain adequately qualified people to fill these slots. A potential solution to this problem might be a conferencing system between representatives at each of these centers to remove the need for actual physical presence. Each would know his contact at each other's agency and could direct questions and requests for information to them. They could be equipped with a wide diversity of communication modes than just telephone (say high-speed fax, closed circuit TV, etc.) if that should prove beneficial in fulfilling their responsibilities. Admiral King remarked that this is the direction in which things are moving.

(S)   Admiral King feels that the recently activated National Operations and Intelligence Watch Officer Net (NOIWON) is a good example of what can be done to implement an effective conferencing capability. It is a voice network connecting key Washington area watch officers at such agencies as the NMCC the (DDO), CIA, DIA, State, NSA, and the White House. Its purpose is to allow these watch officers to rapidly and routinely compare notes on what is going on. There is an agreed upon simplified format for the exchange of information which involves a series of interrogatives (what?, where?, when?, etc.), space for what additional information is required, status, and recommendations. In Admiral King's opinion, it goes right to the heart of the Washington area watch officer problem and he believes it is gaining widespread acceptance. The net is simple in concept, but it serves a very real need, which has not been well served in the past.

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(U)   Admiral King continued that one must not completely ignore the value
of the physical presence of State and/or CIA representatives in the NMCC.
Physical presence allows the J-3 and DDO to get to know the strong and weak
points of these people so that they can better interpret their judgements
and opinions.

(S)   Admiral King also commented briefly on the crisis management relation-
ship between the NMCC and the CIA. In his view, the CIA support to the NMCC
is generally quite satisfactory. However, he noted that the DIA gets very
nervous when the NMCC talks directly to the CIA. The normal channel of
communication is through the Senior Intelligence Watch Officer in the NMIC;
however, the NOIWON has circumvented this practice to a degree. One reason
Admiral King pointed out for the DIA's nervousness is that the CIA often comes
up with a different view of things than does the DIA.

COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN TOP DECISION-MAKERS AND ITS PROBLEMS

(C)   While the Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) sits in the NMCC and
tries to orchestrate the military activities, the main decisions and actions
in crises that might involve military action, are usually made in one of the
Secretary's offices or in a telephone conversation between the Secretary of
Defense, Secretary of State, the CJCS, or in WSAG meetings. The channel
used for communications concerning high-level policy decisions is frequently
SPECAT Exclusive messages. The reasons that SPECATS are used are for pri-
vacy and reliability purposes, they get to an individual by name. Con-
sequently, the principals resort to these in order to (a) assure the named
person gets the message, and (b) that as few people as possible, other than
the named person, get the message.

(C)   SPECATS are universally despised by staff people because they are
not party to them; hence, they don't know what is going on. Admiral King
feels that we have to find better modes of communication that do not have the
disadvantages of SPECATS, but still retains its major advantages of knowing
that the named individual has gotten the message, and few others.

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STRATEGIC WARNING PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS

(S)   Admiral King is quite favorably impressed with the efforts currently
being pursued by ARPA/RCA to improve methods of presenting strategic
warning indicators. The key thing that has been done to date under this
effort, in his opinion, is that they are making an effort to quantify the
"unusualness" about certain indicators. They are exhibiting unusualness
on a log scale so that "extraordinary" activities "leap out at you".

(S)   The DIA would prefer that all information on movements of enemy
forces come through them. They say that it is too hazardous to have raw
intelligence come direct to watch officers in the NMCC. It is King's con-
tention that this leads to unnecessary delays.

(S)   As a specific example, he noted that during the 1973 Arab-Israeli
War, it suddenly became very important to know, on a near real-time basis
in the NMCC, what the Soviets were doing in the Indian Ocean, the Persian
Gulf, the Red Sea, etc. It was essential to know how many Soviet warships,
how many subs, etc. were deployed in these areas. This information by itself,
of course, was not sufficient for planning our moves, because it is not
enough to know just where the Soviets are. You also have to know where U. S.,
British, French, and Israeli units are, and this information comes in large
part from non-intelligence sources. In this instance King found that NOSIC
could indeed supply the information on Soviet naval unit deployment direct
to the NMCC without going through the NMIC. That's the way King feels it can
and ought to be done.

(S)   It was also noted that in the NMCC, the position of ships, both Soviet
and U. S., as shown there are always behind their actual positions. It is
very difficult at any given time to know, for example how many of our
carriers are being tailed by how many ships at a given moment. The routine
status information can be 18 to 24 hours old, or older. It doesn't have to
be (unless EMCOM is in effect). If we put our focus on a given area, we can
get much more timely status information than 18 to 24 hours; but it is very
difficult to get anything like an hour. This point needs to receive explicit
consideration when one projects controlling forces from a remote, central
command center (like Washington), where the information to support decisions
has a long time lag associated with it compared to the shorter time delay
that the man on the scene has to cope with.

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(S)   In addition, an NSOC terminal is in the JRC adjacent to the NMCC.
King feels that if something of a critical nature comes from intelligence
sources it is imperative that it lands on the DDO's desk at the same time
it lands on the NMIC desk--i.e., without arbitrary delay.

(C)   Admiral King agreed with the perception that most of the first level
problems in strategic warning seem to be in the data filtering and presentation
functions. This was in answer to the following question. "Considering the
whole problem of decision support, what, in your view, is it that are now the
principal functions limiting the ability to provide adequate support? Is it

- Collection of data?
- Communication?
- Data processing/analyses?
- Data filtering?
- Data assimilation/presentation?"

(C)   King expanded on this reply to say that we can now collect and transmit
far more information than we can cope with. To his mind, the greatest problem
is the selection of essential information from the great mass of data avail-
able; the selection of things that are of interest and importance in a pri-
ority sequence. This is a problem throughout the C^2 hierarchy. Certainly
the components in each of the Unified Commands and the CINCs of the Unified
Commands have this problem. SAC has probably done the best in coping with
it, but their mission is strategic and is more straight forward and defini-
tive than that of general purpose force commands. The NMCC is notably and
seriously deficient in this regard, and King feels that other watch centers
in Washington are also deficient.

(S)   Again, King reiterated that with respect to strategic warning, the
key question is: "Is it real or exercise?" At present, it is the one ques-
tion that we are capable of answering with the least degree of precision of
all questions, and it is the real one. Furthermore, you cannot answer this
question with any confidence until after the fact. King feels that on the
eve of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Sadat himself may not have known whether
his military activities were to be real or exercises depending on the results
of his machinations and his perception of the reactions he would get, par-
ticularly from the U. S. and Soviets. It may have been that he was geared to

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snatch back the invasion at the last minute. Consequently, you have to get
down to the next layer of the problem. "What are the key elements of a real
attack that, if missing, point to a conclusion that it is an exercise?"

(S)   It is obvious that an attack called back still involved real prepara-
tion for an attack and not just an exercise. Thus the problem we face is
that we have to know whether they have, in fact, postured themselves to
carry out an attack, whether they go through with it or not. If the enemy
has, then we must be willing to respond by posturing ourselves to defend
against it. The implications of this for effective system exercising are
discussed in a subsequent section.

(S)   King pointed out that the indicator that most strongly said to him
that preparations were for real in October 1973, was a report that the Syrians
were requisitioning civilian taxies and privately-owned trucks to haul
troops and supplies. This is such a drastic action by a government and
represents such a disruption of the fragile Syrian civilian economy that it
would only be done in the most extreme circumstances. You have to know the
doctrines and procedures by which your opponents prepare for war. You have
to know what their problems are in preparing for war. King noted that we
should bear in mind that the intelligence analysts also received this indica-
tor; however, it was overwhelmed by many other things that looked completely
normal. The intelligence people were a victim of their own proliferation of
sources, and beguiled by past Arab exercises at that time of year.

(S)   Concern has been raised as to the utility, relative to the making of
key decisions, of the vast amount of intelligence information gathered (at
great cost), and sophisticated methods of processing and presentation. The
principal concern is: What difference does all this make with respect to the
real decisions that have to be made in time of crisis. Most of the top level
people are not technologists, many of them are not military people, some are
politicians and many are lawyers. What impact does intelligence have on their
decisions? In answer to this concern, Admiral King stated that the impact of
intelligence varies with the particulars of the situation; but it does have
definitive influence on decision maker's state of mind and judgements they
make. However, all of this intelligence material, gathered at so much cost,

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really comes down to just a few key points in a given crisis. Without the background essentials richly filled in, in the minds of the decision makers, they will not be able to adequately evaluate these key points distilled from intelligence sources. They must gain almost an intuitive perception of the threat and changes in it. It is crucial to find some way of conveying the background before things break, so that intelligence information being received as the crisis begins to break will have impact.

(S)   There is also a concern relative to the impact on key decision makers of presentation techniques showing all sorts of probabilities of possible outcomes. Are such presentation modes really effective? In Admiral King's view, you certainly don't force the decision that we have to "go to war" based on calculations of probabilities. They are more useful in "filling in the background". In the "real world", Admiral King pointed out that the following scenario is most likely to occur. Should the Secretary of Defense find himself in the NMCC with all the warning panels "clacking away", the first thing he would do, if it hadn't already been initiated by the DDO, would be to request that General Lou Clay (CINCNORAD) be gotten on the telephone. His first question is likely to be "What does Clay say about the situation?" The first move is almost always to get the trusted advisor, and/or the guy with the responsibility, into the act personally. In many cases, the "trusted advisor" may know relatively little about the institution under consideration. An example of this was President Kennedy's use of Robert Kennedy.

(U)   Whatever system that is devised, in the way of decision-making aids, must retain the flexibility to adapt to the user's style; because as personalities change, styles change. Equally important is the fact that national policy can change more rapidly than can the system hardware.

(S)   King feels that our current C^2 capabilities are out of balance with the emerging national policy with respect to Flexible Response Options (FRO). He feels that we lack both the necessary planning and communication capabilities. Much work is, of course, in progress to fill these shortfalls.

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PROBLEMS OF FILTERING DATA FOR TOP DECISION MAKERS

(U)   This selection of essential information involves a filtering process by people at levels below that of key decision makers. These decision makers will unavoidably be troubled by the concern that they are not getting all the information that is really important, because they are relying on many people's judgement down the line relative to what is important enough to send forward. There is no question that the top decision makers will always personally want to look at summaries (daily, 6 hr. sit rep), from the fellow on the scene. The top decision makers usually will staff the next one or two echelons below them with at least some people whom they know and have faith in to do this information selection for them.

(U)   Once you go down a few layers in the hierarchy, the top decision makers have little direct ability to designate or to know the people filtering information being forwarded to them. At these lower levels one has to rely on using "standard procedures" (what the guidelines say) to do the filtering. King feels that these procedures work reasonably well.

PROBLEMS OF CURRENT SYSTEM EXERCISES

(S)   Admiral King advocates that we should establish a procedure of going to DEFCON 3 or even DEFCON 2 on a random no-notice basis, but averaging about once a year. The purpose for doing this is to condition our forces, our country, and the Soviets to this kind of activity. It is the same principle as deploying increasing numbers of submarines over the years so that one does not cause great attention and anxiety if you deploy a large number of subs for some reason. Any exercise of any appreciable magnitude will cause public notice; and because it is seldom if ever done, there is always much anxiety and concern when done for real-world purposes.

The State Department would, in all probability, object to such a proposal as being "provocative". In addition, large scale exercises, such as those King would like to see, would cost a lot of money. Furthermore, when a real crisis seems to be brewing; i.e. another country is posturing itself such that it could launch a real attack, State will not let the military re-posture itself because they claim it would be provocative. Thus King feels

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we are "in a box". King wants to get us out of this straight-jacket, and to do so, he proposes to randomly increase the readiness level of U. S. forces. He would start at the theater level first, and then work up to world-wide exercises similar to the Soviet exercise OKEAN of a few years ago.

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